



BALANCING ACT

By Halé Sofia Schatz

Who today doesn't feel the effects of our fast-paced lives? We work, communicate, obtain information, make purchases, expect everything, and are expected to do everything, faster than ever before. We're also over-stimulated, over-stressed, and just plain overwhelmed. For most of us speed spells stress and the increased pressures to keep up are taking a toll on our physical and emotional health. We may not be able to change the pace of the world, but we do have choices in how we cope with the speed and stress of our 21st century-lives, starting with our most basic of daily needs: what we eat.

As a longtime gardener, I've learned from my little plot of land that you reap what you sow. If I give my vegetables and fruit trees the right soil and fertilizer they will reward me with juicy, delicious vegetables and fruits. But if I abandon my garden and forget about watering, weeding and fertilizing, then I will receive back that neglect in overgrown plants that don't produce well.

What's true for the garden is also true for all of us: For something to grow, it has to be fed. Of course we know that we would starve without food and that our bodies depend on a certain number of calories each day to function. Beyond basic survival, what we eat and how we feed ourselves can make a profound difference in how we feel physically, emotionally, and energetically.

You've heard the saying, you are what you eat. Well, I like to say, you eat what you are. What I mean is that people tend to eat foods that perpetuate certain behaviors. For example, to keep up with the hectic demands of work and family, many people fuel themselves with stimulants like caffeine, sugar, and fast foods. People are grabbing breakfast and coffee on their way to work, eating a quick lunch at their desk, drinking coffee and colas to deal with the mid-afternoon drop in energy, and eating at restaurants or having take-out food much more regularly. It's a vicious cycle. Fast-lives feed on



fast-foods, and the quick fix pick-me-ups keep the fast lives spinning out of control.

I want to remind you that we do have the power to choose each day to feed, nourish, and grow the parts of ourselves to create more balance in this daily chaos.

There's a simple yet poignant story that gets to the choice each of us has in how we want to nourish ourselves. A Native American elder was teaching her grandchildren about life. She said to them: "A fight is going on inside of me. It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear and anger. The other wolf stands for joy, peace, and love. This same fight is going on inside you and inside every other person too." The children thought about and then asked: "Which wolf will win?" The wise woman simply replied: "The one you feed."

Margrit is a passionate, driven, and competitive businesswoman with a recent degree from a top university and a high-powered job in the financial sector.

Encouraged by her family from a young age to be independent, she has only known success. She works hard to achieve it, too, typically putting in 12 to 15 hour days at the office. Margrit came to see me because her perfectionism and workaholic tendencies were leaving her little time to nourish herself or to enjoy life. She had convinced herself that she only had time for take-out food, which she ate for every meal, as she put her work above everything else in her life—from food to relationships. People saw her as a highly successful and competent young woman who couldn't possibly have any problems. But this same woman was also crying herself to sleep every night because she felt so depressed and alone.

In my nourishment practice, I have noticed that this pattern has become much more common. People are driven today more than ever. They are filled with fire, passion, and determination to succeed. At the same time, they feel lonely, disconnected from their feelings, and depressed. It's become the accepted norm to be driven to succeed professionally at the cost of all other personal development. But we need to make sure we feed and nurture *all* parts of ourselves—our bodies, emotions, minds, and spirits—for us to feel truly empowered in our lives.

Realizing the only fast-track she was on was towards a life of discontentment, Margrit is now trying to find the balance between her drive for professional success and her desire to have a life that's more fulfilling than just her professional identity. First of all, she needed to realize that she does have choices in creating more balance for herself even with all the external influences and pressures.

Margrit knew that regaining balance meant she had to stop eating all of her meals out. Since I find that breakfast is so critical in setting a tone for the day, I recommended that she begin taking her journey towards truly nourishing herself with this meal. Instead of running out the door and grabbing her usual cup of coffee and muffin at the office, Margrit now makes it a point to give herself time for a satisfying breakfast at home. Breakfast doesn't have to be a fancy meal or a big cooking effort, but do make it peaceful, loving, even beautiful. Additionally, she has begun to take small walks near her office at lunchtime in the middle of her hectic day. This gives her breathing space to relax and reconnect to her own rhythms, which she's discovered are much slower than the pace of the business world. The extra few minutes to consciously enjoy your breakfast in the morning or to take a short, rejuvenating break in the middle of the day will go a long way in reminding you that you are very much worth the effort.

I share with you three simple yet powerful guidelines that have helped Margrit and many of my other clients nourish their inner place of balance.

SLOW DOWN

If you are constantly in a rush and find yourself regularly saying "I don't have time!" then, my friend, you are going too fast. There will always only be 24 hours in a day. The attitude we have toward those 24 hours, however, makes all the difference. As I already mentioned, how we start our morning sets the pattern for the rest of the day. If you're like Margrit, running to work at the last minute and not making the time to nourish yourself in the morning, time can feel oppressive and limited. On the other hand, preparing in advance by shopping or cooking ahead of time will make you feel less rushed and frazzled. By slowing down, you also have the opportunity to pay attention to what you're eating and how those foods make you feel. When was the last time you really tasted your food, slowly chewing each bite,

and allowing it to gently to land in your stomach, and listened to when you are really full? Remember that fast foods create fast lives. Make a list of the foods that you know make you feel good and energetic. Keep the list up on your refrigerator to remind yourself regularly.

TRUST YOUR SENSES

Even though most of us are living more urban lives with less dependency on our senses for survival, our six senses are still our antennae to both our inner and external worlds. For example, has your sense of smell ever led you wrong? Has something that smelled disgusting ever been tempting to eat? Unlikely. We rely on our five senses—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling—every day. I always like to include our sixth sense as well, our intuition. Have you ever thought of someone whom you've been out of touch with, and they emailed or called you within a couple of days? That's intuition in action.

If we feed ourselves mostly clean, fresh, vital foods, our taste buds will be much better attuned to receive information about a particular food, its benefit to the body, and how much should be eaten. By the same measure, if we consume too many processed sugary or salty foods and snacks our taste buds dull, causing us to want more and more. Because it's integral to taste, I always recommend people develop their sense of smell when it comes to purchasing, preparing, and consuming foods. How does a piece of ripe fresh fruit or a piece of fresh farm cheese smell versus a packaged snack? And then pay attention to the information that your nose sends to your mouth and what your body has to say about which food will really nourish you.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Whether it is simpler meals, simpler schedules, or living in simpler homes, maintaining a balance is much easier when you keep it simple. Now, simple doesn't mean *boring* or *uninteresting*. Some of the finest meals I've had are those prepared with the simplest but freshest ingredients. In fact, when fruits and vegetables are just picked, or fish has just been caught, very little needs to be added to make these foods delicious. When I purchase prepared foods I always check the label to see the number of ingredients used, as well as if there are any additives, and I always look for products that have the simplest ingredients.

For many people, eating has become a complicated affair involving too many different

kinds of foods at one meal. Whether it's acid reflux, heartburn, ulcers, or elimination problems, it is all the body's way of saying "too much." Actually, excess in any area of our lives can create more stress. If you're like most people, then you probably have more on your plate than you can handle. What can you let go of? What can you simplify? For starters, you might try simplifying one meal, cleaning out a room in your home, or making more time in your schedule to take a walk or have tea with a friend.

The body's natural inclination is for health, well-being, and vitality, and its natural wisdom is to perpetually strive for balance. It's a beautiful thing.

To reach Hale Sofia Schatz:

info@heartofnourishment.com

Or visit www.halesofiaschatz.com.

The Turkish version of her book, BUDA Size Yemege Gelse, is available in all bookstores.

NOTE: Hale will be in Istanbul during September and will be teaching programs at HillsideSU, Antalya in October and November. For more information about her programs and individual consults please contact, 212-352-9350 or ay@aydanismanlik.com